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Wavell's Campaigns in the Middle East: An Analysis of Operational Art and the Implications for Today

A Monograph
by

Major Lawrence Rucker Snead III

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School of Advanced Military Studies
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Major Lawrence Rucker Sneed III, USA

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School of Advanced Military Studies
ATTN: ATZL-SWV
Fort Leavenworth, Kansas 66027-6900
COM (913) 684-3437 AUSA 552-3437

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Approved by:

Ernest H. Evans Monograph Director
Ernest H. Evans, Ph.D.

Gregory Fontenot Director, School of
COL Gregory Fontenot, MA, MMAS Advanced Military
Studies

Philip J. Brookes Director, Graduate
Philip J. Brookes, Ph.D. Degree Program

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ABSTRACT

Wavell's Campaigns in the Middle East: An Analysis of Operational Art and the Implications for Today by MAJ Lawrence Rucker Snead III, USA, 53 pages.

Today the United States confronts an uncertain world. The strategic environment has changed. It no longer has one main enemy and a military force to confront that foe. Instead, the United States must be prepared to deal with a multiple of possible threats as its military continues to downsize. This new regional orientation and world situation requires that the US Military be ready to fight simultaneous major regional contingencies to achieve the victories that the American people expect.

Therefore, this study examines Field Marshall Wavell's campaigns in the Middle East in WW II to provide a historical case study of a similar situation. There he had to simultaneously conduct a large number of campaigns and operations over four theaters of operations against different enemies under difficult conditions to achieve strategic objectives. It compares this case study with the current strategic military requirements facing the US and current US Military doctrine to determine if the US is prepared to deal with multiple simultaneous regional contingencies.

Finally, this monograph indicates that the US Military needs to update both its **National Military Strategy** and its doctrine in order to be prepared to fight and win multiple simultaneous major regional contingencies in the future. In addition, this study has indicated a number of implications for the conduct of operational art by the US Military.

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I. INTRODUCTION

With the history of World War II most students of military history know of the legendary battles and campaigns in the North African desert as the Africa Korps under Field Marshall Erwin Rommel or the "Desert Fox" repeatedly clashed with the British Eight Army under a series of commanders for control of the Western Desert theater of operations. For two years the tide of battle edded and flowed as the Germans and British launched a series of exciting armoured attacks and counterattacks against each other before a combined Anglo-American campaign finally drove the Germans from North Africa.

However, most American military officers do not realize that the campaigns in the desert were just one component or aspect of a much larger and more complicated British theater of war. From 11 June 1940 with the Italian declaration of war until his relief from command on 22 June 1941, British forces under the command of then General and later Field Marshall Sir Archibald Percival Wavell in their Middle Eastern theater of war conducted 14 major warfighting campaigns or operations and two Operations Other Than War(OOTW) campaigns in four theaters of operations against German, Italian, Vichy French, and Nationalist forces while defending Great Britain's position in the Middle East(see Annex A and B). The British conducted most of these campaigns in a combined environment and all of the campaigns were joint in nature. Additionally in April and May 1941 the limited British forces simultaneously conducted 10 campaigns across all four theaters of operation.

This lack of knowledge and understanding about this neglected period and area of World War II is regrettable because of what it can offer to the study of

operational art and campaign planning for the modern American military officer facing unknown future. Wavell simultaneously conducted his campaigns across tremendous distances against multiple enemies, under austere conditions in a harsh environment, with limited forces, with combined and joint forces, with at times unattainable military objectives, and while receiving constant and ever-changing political guidance and unsolicited military advice from his political master, Prime Minister Winston Churchill.

Today as the United States transitions in the post cold war period it no longer has the luxury of preparing for a single super power enemy such as the former Soviet Union. Instead it now faces the dilemma of possibly having to deal with multiple and perhaps simultaneous threats, with ever shrinking levels of combat power. The world and the US Military are changing while the mission remains the same: defend the national interests of the United States around the world. Thus, what are the implications for operational art in the US Military today in terms of dealing with multiple regional contingencies in light of the British experience in the Middle East from June 1940 until June 1941?

To answer this question, this study first provides an historical overview of Wavell's Campaigns in the Middle East. Next it examines the concept of operational art based on current theory and military doctrine to provide a point departure for an examination Wavell's Campaigns as operational art for a comparison with current US Military requirements and doctrine. Finally, this study will present possible implications for the US Military's current conduct of operational art in possible regional contingencies.

II. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

STRATEGIC BACKGROUND

Though Wavell assumed command of the Middle East theater as the General Commander in Chief in 1939 prior to the declaration of war, he knew that war was eminent and realized that he had to assess his command and situation quickly. His position included many wide ranging military and political responsibilities besides warfighting.

As Commander in Chief Middle East Wavell reported to the Army Chief of Staff Field Marshall Sir John Dill. Dill as a member of the British Chiefs of Staff in London reported to Prime Minister Winston Churchill. Churchill, who also served as the Minister of Defense of the War Cabinet, reported to the Parliament and the British people. With these two positions Churchill became the principle individual who provided the political and military leadership for the prosecution of the war.¹

As Commander in Chief Wavell was expected to coordinate and if necessary conduct a joint defense of the theater of war together with the British air and naval component commanders. Because so much of the theater was land based, he soon emerged as the de facto overall military leader of the theater. Both Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham and Air Chief Marshall Sir Arthur Longmore realized that their forces would play a supporting role to Wavell's land forces.²

In addition to his vast military responsibilities he was expected to work closely with the British Foreign Office and ambassadors as they dealt with the multitude of countries in the theater. He also conducted political and military negotiations with the other military powers of the theater such as the Greeks.

Turks, and French. Because of the military and political responsibilities of his position and his leadership abilities, Wavell emerged as the dominant individual in the theater for planning and conducting combined operations. Thus, in many respects, except for his lack of command over British air and naval units, his responsibilities and authority equaled that of a Commander in Chief (CINC) of a modern US unified command.³

Geographically his command included more than 20 countries or territories spread over three continents. He divided this theater of war into four theaters of operations. They included the Balkans with Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, Turkey, and Yugoslavia; Palestine with Syria, Iraq, Palestine, part of Persia, and Saudi Arabia; the Western Desert with Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt; and East Africa with Sudan, Eritrea, Ethiopia, the Somalilands, Kenya, and Uganda. It was a vast area measuring over 2000 miles east to west and 1700 miles north to south while it covered approximately 3,500,000 square miles.⁴

Terrain within his command varied considerably, but most of it was hot, harsh, and barren, except along water sources. The theater had a primitive infrastructure with few railroads or hard surfaced roads. Oil from the Persian Gulf area served as the critical resource of the region. Egypt with its vital Suez Canal served as the geographic, strategic, and logistical center of the theater.

Wavell's forces faced diverse threats on all fronts within his command. In 1939 the Italians posed a threat to the Balkan states with their home based forces. In the Western Desert they had nearly 250,000 troops poised on the border with Egypt. In addition in East Africa they had nearly 300,000 occupying Ethiopia and threatening British Somaliland, the Sudan, and Egypt. Germany remained preoccupied with western Europe, but they could enter the region at any time especially through the Balkans where they could then threaten Turkey and the Middle Eastern oil sources.⁵

Turkey and France remained as the wild cards. In World War I Turkey had joined with Germany against the Allied Powers. During Wavell's tenure in the Middle East his discussions and negotiations with Turkey occupied a great deal of attention and time. Great Britain wanted to get Turkey to join her or at least remain neutral on the northern flank of the theater as a possible impediment to a southern expansion by Germany.⁶ France initially served as an ally in the west in Algeria and Tunisia and in the north in Syria. After the fall of France, Vichy forces occupied those areas, cooperated somewhat with Germany, and posed a threat to British interests.

In August 1939 in the Middle East theater of war the British had minimal forces to confront these possible foes. Scattered throughout his theater Wavell had less than 90,000 troops from a number of different countries and territories. Most of these, newly arrived to the area, remained poorly trained and under equipped for modern mechanized operations. As an imperial power, Great Britain was able to call on other members of the Commonwealth. As a result every operation planned and executed by Wavell's forces involved combined warfare with its attendant political difficulties. Unfortunately, the Middle East remained a forgotten theater for reinforcements as Great Britain prepared for war on the home islands and in France.⁷

With the fall of France in June 1940 British attention, after providing for the defense of the home islands, shifted to the Middle East theater of war. The theater offered the only opportunity for British forces to strike back at their foes using land forces.

Had Great Britain and later the Allies lost control of the Middle East they would have suffered a number of adverse and perhaps disastrous consequences:

*The Axis powers would have gained access to the oil of the
Caucasus and Persian Gulf.

- *Germany and Japan would have gained a possible point of juncture for their forces to conduct combined operations.
- *The Allies would have lost the southern supply routes into the Soviet Union.
- *The Allies would have lost the Suez Canal and the shorter lines of communications it offered to the Far East.
- *The Axis powers would have isolated Turkey thus forcing her to cooperate with them.
- *The Allies would have lost control of the Mediterranean Sea from which they could best threaten the flank and rear of Axis operations on the continent.
- *A loss of the Middle East coupled with the previous Allied losses could perhaps cause the Allies to sue for peace.⁸

Though while Great Britain's strategic focus shifted to the Middle East in 1940, Wavell had been planning and preparing the theater for war for the past year. He initially received little strategic guidance for his theater other than to prevent its loss.⁹ However, he quickly finished an initial strategic assessment and concluded that:

The task of the Staff of the Middle East Command is therefore to plan, in conjunction with the other services, not merely the defense of Egypt and our other interests in the Middle East, but such measures of offense as will enable us and our Allies to dominate the Mediterranean at the earliest possible moment: and therefore to take the counter offensive against Germany in Eastern and S E Europe.¹⁰

He issued this mission to his staff and command and began planning on how to best accomplish this vast mission.

As he analyzed the situation and went through the estimate process he developed some planning guidance and tasks that included:

1. Make certain that Egypt and the Canal, which must be the Base of all our Mediterranean effort, are secure.
2. Action to clear the Red Sea of Enemy
3. Action to clear the Eastern Mediterranean.
4. Consideration of eventual land action in S E Europe (Thrace, Salonica, Rumania), or in Russia.¹¹

These planning considerations became the basis for all British operations in the Middle East theater.

In order to achieve these tasks across this wide theater Wavell realized that he would need substantial reinforcements in the excess of 300,000 troops. To prepare for this he ordered the development of a massive logistic base area in the Delta region to handle the requirements for power projection of a force of over 25 divisions.¹²

August 1939 through May 1940

From the time he assumed command in 1939 until the Italians declared war on 10 June 1939, Wavell and his command prepared for war in all theaters. As reinforcements and new equipment arrived from Great Britain and the other members of the Commonwealth he had them focus on training and readiness for combat. His immediate worries dealt with the large Italian forces to his west and south and the threat they posed in the *Western Desert and East Africa*.

Wavell also had to deal with internal problems in Egypt and Palestine. In both places the British were involved with operations that lasted throughout this period. In particular Wavell needed to avoid inflaming the passions of the Arabs against the British. He relied very heavily on political means and negotiations to maintain peace and tranquillity. Wavell obviously realized that his theater of war was complicated enough without having to deal with nationalistic uprisings in his base of operations.

In Palestine the British served as the referee between Palestinians and Jews who were both intent on occupying what each saw as their rightful land from Biblical times. From 1936-39 there had been a particularly bloody insurrection marked by guerrilla actions and terrorist activities on both sides. Very often the British got caught in the middle. By 1940 an uneasy truce had emerged between the combatants and the British expended a great deal of

political and military energy to insure that there was not a resurgence during the war with the Axis powers.¹³

In 1936 Great Britain and Egypt had signed a treaty granting Egyptian independence. Under the terms of the treaty Great Britain could continue to station military forces in Egypt for the defense of the Suez Canal. Not all Egyptian were happy with this arraignment. There existed a growing nationalistic sentiment which wanted Great Britain out of Egypt. Wavell had to deal with the politicians and diplomats so that the British would not have to fight an insurgency in the country that served as their largest base in the Middle East.¹⁴

Historically the British viewed the Balkans as an indirect route into Europe and into the Middle East. The British government maintained a series of ongoing diplomatic negotiations there with the Greeks, Bulgarians, Yugoslavs, and Turks. They wanted to maintain an Allied presence there to counter any possible Axis moves and serve as a base for future operations.

June -November 1940

June proved to be a disastrous month for the Allied cause. Their forces in France received a terrible beating at the hands of the Germans highlighted by the evacuation at Dunkirk and culminating with the surrender of France on 22 June. On 10 June Mussolini declared war on the Allies and invaded France. Throughout these months Great Britain stood alone against the Axis powers.

Churchill faced tremendous pressures as he tried to provide the leadership necessary to stem the tide of defeat and lead Great Britain to victory. On 7 August he summoned Wavell back to Britain for discussions on the Middle East and the prospects for future operations. Immediately there was a clash of opinions and personalities which clouded the remainder of their relationship. Churchill wanted immediate successful military action to counter the Axis powers and offer some hope to the British. To Churchill

A soldier was a soldier and, as such, should be available on the instant to be thrown into battle irrespective of his state of training, the incompleteness of his equipment and the fact, deplorable but inescapable, that more than half any modern army is composed of men and women who have no place in the firing line but performed the routine task of making it possible for the fighting men to fight.¹⁵

His view and understanding of military capabilities colored all of his relations with Wavell. He failed to understand the military realities of modern warfare, the vastness of the region and the paucity of forces that Wavell had to operate with. Wavell, however, failed to realize and understand the awesome political and military responsibilities that Churchill labored under at that time. The resulting friction and at times misunderstandings between the political and military leadership further complicated the conduct of the war in the Middle East.¹⁶

Western Desert

Wavell, with his forces confronted more than 200,000 Italian troops in this theater of operation, immediately put his forces on alert. By 11 June he ordered his troops to begin aggressive patrolling along the border between Egypt and Libya to gather intelligence on the Italians and to disrupt their activities. The British forces had immediate success as they took the initiative and caught the Italians by surprise.¹⁷

Unfortunately, with the declaration war the British could no longer guarantee the safety of unescorted civilian merchant ships in the Mediterranean. Unless in convoys merchant men now had to make the long trip around Africa to reinforce the British forces in the Middle East. This increased the transient time of ships to the Middle East from Great Britain by an additional six weeks. Never the less reinforcements continued to flow into the theater at a steady rate. During the middle of August, even as Great Britain prepared for the expected invasion of the home islands, Churchill decided to send badly needed tanks and

artillery reinforcements to Egypt. By September Wavell was receiving approximately 1000 reinforcements a day from Great Britain, its Dominions, and the Commonwealth nations. On 11 November the Royal Navy attacked and destroyed the bulk of the Italian navy's offensive capability at Toranto. This relieved some of the pressure on the Royal Navy as they no longer had to fear an Italian strike into the Eastern Mediterranean.¹⁸

Throughout the summer months Mussolini pushed his forces to prepare to invade Egypt. Finally, on 13 September after many delays the Italians began their slow, deliberate advance into Egypt under constant pressure from the retreating British. By 16 September the Italians reached their farthest advance of about 50 miles with occupying the small sea port of Sidi Barrani. They immediately settled into occupation duties and began erecting fortifications. The British covering force immediately regained the initiative with their aggressive patrolling and continually harassed the Italians while the remainder of the British continued arming, training, and preparing for future offensive operations. By late fall Wavell was receiving ever increasing pressure from Churchill to go on the offensive and use some of those troops sitting in Egypt. To mitigate this pressure and to mollify Churchill, on 8 November Wavell informed him of Operation Compass, an attack in the desert.¹⁹

East Africa

On 4 July the Italians launched limited attacks from their bases in Ethiopia north into the Sudan against British held towns along the border. The Italians quickly consolidated their gains and changed over to defensive operations. The British resumed patrolling until they could gain enough strength take the offense and recover their territory. In addition the British used special operating forces to train guerrilla bands and ferment nationalist turmoil within Ethiopia against the Italians.²⁰

On 3 August the Italians attacked into British Somaliland from the west with overwhelming forces. The weight of their over 10 to one odds forced the British to retreat. The operation resulted in the first of many political difficulties between Wavell and Churchill. The Italian capture of British Somaliland resulted in a major Italian propaganda victory and infuriated Churchill. He could not understand why the British casualties were so low and that the forces had retreated so quickly. Wavell realized that he needed to trade space for time and conserve his forces for future offensive operations.²¹

Palestine

The major problem within this period came from the fall of France. Neutral Vichy forces in Lebanon and Syria were no longer members of the Anglo-French alliance protecting the northern front of the theater. The threat existed that those forces would now collaborate with the Germans allowing them to access to the backdoor of Egypt. To meet this possible threat and keep the local situation between the Arabs and the Jews under control, the British had to keep over 20,000 troops, badly needed elsewhere, in Palestine.²²

Balkans

Because of this situation with the Vichy French, Turkey became even more isolated as it was all but surrounded by nations sympathetic to the Germans. Wavell and members of the British foreign service made a number of trips to Turkey to insure her continued neutrality.

After her declaration of war Italy also began to flex her muscles in the Balkans. As a counter Great Britain continued her negotiations with the Yugoslavs and the Greeks because she did not want to give up a possible foothold on the European continent without a fight. On 24 August with the permission of the Greek government, the British sent their first troops to Crete to prepare the island for future operations. Wavell's paucity of resources and the threats he

faced elsewhere in his theater severely limited the amount and types of forces that he could deploy. On 28 October Mussolini invaded Greece, but the Greeks soon demonstrated that they would be a much tougher foe than the Italian expected. Britain warily watched the situation in Greece, but did not become overly involved because of a lack of resources and a desire not to get Germany involved in the fighting.²³

December 1940-January 1941

At the strategic level the direct threat of a German invasion had past. Britain had won the Battle of Britain as the German focus returned to the continent and looked eastward. The Middle East served as the one theater of war where the British forces could strike back at the Axis Powers with land forces. Thus, the pressure was on Wavell to act and win. During this period his focus on combat operations lay with his campaigns in the Western Desert and East Africa, while diplomacy and contingency planning had the lead in his other theaters of operations.

Western Desert

Throughout the fall the British XIII Corps prepared for Operation Compass. They intensively trained and established the logistical bases required for the future offensive operations. Initially the Wavell envisioned a five day raid against Italian positions to drive them out of Egypt, reduce the threat to the Canal and the Delta region and to gain a badly needed British victory. He intended to limit the operation after its initial success because he was already planning to pull the 4th Indian Division out and transferring it south to the East African theater for an upcoming campaign there.²⁴

However, after launching Operation Compass in conjunction with the Royal Air Force and Navy on 9 December, the British were amazed with their overwhelming success as the Italians rapidly retreated westward into Libya.

Wavell sense an opportunity to destroy the Italian threat in Libya. The British continued to attack with their remaining forces even as the 4th Indian Division withdrew for their long trip south(approximately 2000 miles). Wavell reinforced the XIII Corps with the inexperienced 6th Australian Division as they arrived in theater. The relentless British pressure resulted in the capture of a number of Italian positions and cities in January such as Bardia on the 4th, Tobruk on the 23rd, and Derna on the 30th. These successes brought the British thousands of Italians POW's, newly conquered territory, and a tremendous logistical problem. Wavell wanted to keep the pressure on the Italians here in order to hinder their operations in East Africa and the Balkans.²⁵

East Africa

The Italian capability, though limited, to threaten and interdict shipping in the Red Sea, in addition to the threat they posed to other British interests, proved to be the catalyst for Wavell's campaigns in East Africa. Wavell had to secure the Red Sea so that American shipping with critical supplies could freely proceed on to Egypt. Wavell envisioned a nearly simultaneous two pronged attack starting in February in conjunction with a nationalist. The key factor determining the timing of the attacks hinged on the arrival of the 4th Indian Division and other reinforcements to the theater. The Northern Campaign troops would attack east from Sudan into Eritrea and south into Ethiopia. The Southern Campaign out of Kenya would attacked east into Somalia and then north into Ethiopia. On 19 January the Northern Campaign launched its attack early as the Italians began to withdraw back into Ethiopia.²⁶

Palestine

This theater remained quiet during this period. The negotiations between the factions remained in place. Wavell used the area in Palestine proper as a

location to hold and train newly arrived forces to his command prior to commitment to future operations.

Balkans

By the winter of 1940 the Italian advance into Greece had begun to flounder and the Greeks were having limited success with pushing some of the Italian forces back into Albania. In early January through an analysis of Ultra intercepts the British began to see a repositioning of German forces in the Balkans. Because of these Italian reverses Germany was beginning to take a greater interest in the region to prevent a total Italian defeat and to solidify their southern flank prior to attacking eastward. The British were unsure of the ultimate German motives: assist the Italians, invade Yugoslavia and Greece, or perhaps attack through Turkey into the Middle East and its oil? The Balkans now had the priority in the Middle East. On 10 January Churchill decided that after the fall of Tobruk in the desert that the priority of land operations in the Middle East would go to assisting the Greeks. Since Wavell was already heavily committed in the Western Desert and East Africa he could only offer a couple of regiments which the Greeks declined.²⁷

Churchill desperately wanted to form a Balkan bloc to counter the Germans. Overall the British policy continued to vacillate between Greece and Turkey. During this period Churchill, as he tried to decide which country, to favor, was like a "puppy in a fire-hydrant factory."²⁸ Finally on 31 January Churchill proposed an Anglo-Turkish alliance. He offered air and anti-aircraft assets which were already fully committed elsewhere in the Middle East. Since Wavell did not receive any Ultra messages until the middle of March these decisions out of London only served to confuse him even more on the government's Balkans policy.²⁹

February-March 1941

During this period at the strategic level, besides the Battle of the Atlantic, the focus was on the operations in the Middle East. Churchill desperately wanted to counter German expansion into the Balkans through political and if necessary military means. With in the Middle East, Wavell was at the limit of his resources as he attempted to complete his campaign in the Western Desert and East Africa before he had to divert forces to the Balkans. He faced the dilemma of what constituted a victory and success so that he could then transfer forces and attention to other theaters and possible contingencies.

Western Desert

In the desert the British continued attacking and pursuing the Italians across Libya. On 4 February they made the decision to try to cut off the retreating Italians south of Benghazi. A rapid cross-country pursuit on 5 February allowed the British to establish a blocking position at Beda Fomm. There within two days they cut off and completed the destruction of the Italian 10th Army. During the course of the two month campaign

The British victory was more than complete because it was economic. For the loss of 500 dead, 55 missing, and 1373 wounded they had advanced over 500 miles, destroyed an army of 10 divisions and captured more than 130,000 prisoners, 180 medium and 200 light tanks besides 845 guns. The Italian Army had been humiliated.³⁰

The XIII Corps immediately began preparations to continue their attack on to Tripoli, but the priority had shifted in the Middle East to the upcoming campaigns in the Balkans and East Africa.

The British transitioned to a defensive posture in the desert even while the nature of their enemy drastically changed as General Erwin Rommel and the lead elements of his Africa Corps began arriving in Tripoli on 12 February. Hitler sent the German forces to provide some backbone for the Italians and to stabilize

situation while avoiding any more embarrassing set backs for the Axis. Rommel was to build up his forces and conduct defensive operations. However, by the middle of March the British situation had deteriorated to the point that Rommel's forces were able to attack and start regaining Libya.³¹

Wavell and his forces had failed to realize that the enemy and thus the situation had dramatically changed in the Middle East. Wavell thought that he had at least two months before the Germans would be ready for offensive operations. He knew that he would be done in East Africa by May at the latest so he thought that he could afford to take some risks with the forces that he left in the desert. The arrival of Rommel greatly complicated future operations in both the desert and theaters of operations as once again the British base of operations faced a serious threat.³²

East Africa

The Northern Campaign continued its attack into Eritrea and Ethiopia. Initially British progress was slow as the mountainous terrain and uncharacteristically tough Italian defense limited their advance into Eritrea. The British fought and finally defeated the Italians, after 16 hard days of fighting, for the fortress at Keren on 27 March. This victory greatly simplified the final conquest of Eritrea and made forces, such as the 4th Indian Division, available for redeployment to other theaters.³³

The Southern Campaign began with an attack into Italian Somaliland on 11 February. By 13 February, six days ahead of schedule, the British captured Kismayu and continued on to Mogadishu which fell on 25 February. By the first of March all Italian had been driven out of Italian Somalia. The British headed north into Ethiopia to cut off the Italian forces in British Somaliland. On 16 March the British conducted an amphibious operation out of Aden into British

Somalia. This coupled with the attack out of Italian Somaliland led to the recapture of British Somaliland by the end of March.³⁴

Palestine

Though Palestine itself remained quiet, Wavell was beginning to get concerned with possible German infiltration's into Iraq and Persia in preparation for future operations. Wavell began coordination with the Indian Command since they had the same concerns. Since Wavell was already heavily committed in the Western Desert, East Africa, and the Balkans, the Indian Command, having uncommitted and available forces, on 8 March agreed to take responsibility for this region.³⁵

Balkans

Even though fighting did not erupt until late March and major campaigns were on going in the Western Desert and East Africa, by the middle of February the Balkans had become the most critical theater of operations in the Middle East. Wavell had to conduct political and military negotiations with both the Greeks and the Australians over what forces and how they would be used in the defense of Greece. Wavell fully recognized the risks with trying to defend Greece, but he also understood the political realities. By 22 February after much debate the Greeks were willing to ask for and the British were willing to send forces. Greece's fears increased as the Germans moved into Bulgaria on 1 March.³⁶

By mid-March a mixed British force of British, Australian, New Zealander, and Polish troops ultimately totaling approximately 58,000 began arriving in Greece. The situation in Yugoslavia rapidly began deteriorating on 25 March when it allied itself with Germany. This was followed by a pro-British coup on the 27th which set the stage for the soon to follow German invasion in April.³⁷

April-June 1941

This proved to be the most difficult and final period of Wavell's command in the Middle East. He faced tremendous pressure from London to halt the Axis advance on all fronts. During the month of May Wavell "was accountable for the conduct of five campaigns--the defense of Tobruk and 'Brevity' in the Western Desert, the defense of Crete, the conclusion of the Abyssinian campaign(East Africa), and the incursion into Iraq--while simultaneously preparing for action in the desert and the intervention in Syria."³⁸

Western Desert

The force that Wavell had remaining in the desert was inexperienced and poorly equipped and trained. The Germans launched their first major attack on 31 March and had captured Benghazi within a week as the British forces fell back in disarray. By 10 April the Germans surrounded Tobruk and were continuing to attack east to Egypt. By the end of April the Germans had shattered the western flank of the Middle East and stood at the gates of Egypt. Though Tobruk, under Allied control, remained a thorn in the Axis side, they appeared ready to directly threaten the base of operations in the Delta. The risks that the British took in the desert to provide forces for Greece and East Africa had come back to haunt them.³⁹

Wavell faced this crisis in the desert as Greece fell, Crete remained undefended, revolt smoldered in Iraq, and he attempted to secure a victory in East Africa. Still on 19 April Wavell began planning for a limited offense in the desert to wrest the initiative from Rommel. Churchill finally realized the gravity of the situation and decided on 21 April to send over 300 new tanks through the dangerous, but fast, Mediterranean route as reinforcements. Still he ordered that no retreat from the desert would be contemplated.⁴⁰

By early May through Ultra intercepts, the British realized that the Germans had exhausted their resources fighting to Egypt. Churchill immediately ordered Wavell to attack and take advantage of this opportunity. On 15 May the British forces began their abortive attack, Operation Brevity, to regain the Egyptian frontier and if possible push the Germans back to Tobruk. After two days of heavy fighting the British broke off their attack to consolidate their meager gains and to preserve their forces for their main attack, Operation Battleaxe, scheduled for mid-June.⁴¹

The British began their attack on 14 June to once again defeat the Germans and push on to relieve Tobruk. During three days of heavy fighting the British sustained heavy casualties and no gains with their objectives. The British failed because of poorly trained troops hurriedly rushed into battle, an underestimation of German capabilities, and an intelligence failure on German dispositions and intentions.⁴²

East Africa

On 8 April the British put an end to all organized resistance in Eritrea with the capture of the port of Massawa. This victory coupled with the capture of the Somalilands now opened the Red Sea to British control. On 11 April the Red Sea ceased to be a combat zone in the eyes of the Americans so that American ships could now carry supplies straight into Egypt.⁴³ This greatly eased Wavell's logistical situation. Also, faced with the threats and possible disasters in the Western Desert and the Balkans, Wavell accelerated the withdrawal of troops from East Africa to reinforce those theaters of operations. Within Ethiopia a coordinated effort by the Northern and Southern Campaigns resulted in the eventual capture of the country on 19 May. This ended the major organized operations in East Africa.⁴⁴

Palestine

By the end of April with the British reverses in the Western Desert and the Balkans, Iraqi nationalist Rashid Ali realized that he had a golden opportunity while the British attention was else where. On 2 May he staged a coup against the pro-British government. Even though Wavell was simultaneously fighting campaigns in the Western Desert, East Africa, and the Balkans, London made Wavell responsible for the operation in Iraq. He wanted a political solution because he lacked sufficient military forces and he did not want to fight with and thus anger any Arabs. Churchill said no to this course of action, so on 11 May he launched a two prong attack east from Trans-Jordan and north from Basra focusing on the Iraqi forces around Baghdad. The forces aggressively attacked and prevented the Iraqis from gaining control of the whole country. By 31 May Wavell's troops had successfully put down the rebellion, denied the Germans access to Iraq and its oil and prevented the nationalism from spreading to other Arab lands.⁴⁵

Simultaneously with the operation in Iraq, the situation turned violent with the Vichy French in Lebanon and Syria. In early April the Free French under General Charles de Gualle began pressuring the British to assist them as they attacked to recapture Syria and Lebanon. Because of his other commitments and lack of assets Wavell did not want to get involved any where else at this time. By 14 May the German Luftwaffe was using Syrian airfields to fly supplies and provide air support to Rashid Ali in Iraq. Wavell's lack of desire to provide support for this endeavor further antagonized Churchill and hastened his dismissal.⁴⁶

On 25 May while embroiled in the Battle of Crete, Wavell had his staff begin to plan for operations into Syria. On 8 June with an Anglo-French force composed of 34,000 Commonwealth and Free French troops, Wavell began his

campaign against 37,000 Vichy French troops in Syria. After more than a month of tough fighting, on 14 July the Vichy forces agreed to an armistice ending the campaign.⁴⁷ Wavell's forces once again proved successful in the operation, but it was expensive in terms of both forces lost in Syria and the fact that he was forced to pull additional forces from his fight in the Western Desert. He had to fight both campaigns with inadequate forces. Thus both campaigns took longer and his offense in the desert resulted in a failure.

Balkans

On 6 April Germany launched a simultaneous assault against Greece and Yugoslavia. At that time only a half of the British forces had arrived and occupied positions to fight. The remainder were still arriving. Within two days the Allies faced the collapse of Yugoslavia which expose the left flank into Greece. As a result Greek and British forces began to withdraw to prevent being cut off. The Greeks began to collapse as a result of the rapid German advance precipitating a political crisis. By 13 April Wavell began an evacuation and on the 16th the Greek government requested that the British leave in order to spare the country from greater devastation.⁴⁸

Wavell in conjunction with the RAF and Royal Navy began the evacuation on 22 April and continued it for the next five nights. In spite of heavy losses by the air and naval components the British were able to evacuate almost 51,000 troops or over 80% of the original force. Unfortunately, they lost all of their heavy equipment, tanks, guns, and supplies. Over 27,000 troops to include a large number of Greek soldiers were evacuated straight into preparing for the defense of Crete.⁴⁹

Though a defeat and a great waste of scarce men and resources, the results of the Greek Campaign were not as bad as they were originally feared. Most of the forces, though without equipment, were saved to fight again. Later, though

now debatable, the British argued that the operation in Greece forced the Germans to delay their invasion of the Soviet Union for six weeks. Churchill claimed that "we have paid our debt of honor with far less loss than I feared."⁵⁰ Payment of this debt of honor greatly handicapped Wavell as he attempted to simultaneously counter the Axis powers in all four of his theaters of operations. The losses in aircraft, ships, other equipment and supplies severely hampered follow-on operations in the Middle East. In addition, Churchill finally had lost confidence in Wavell's leadership and ability and openly began to discuss his dismissal and replacement.⁵¹

Though the British had started in late 1940 to prepare for the defense of Crete, the lack of assets hindered their efforts. After the fall of Greece they realized that Crete would be next for the Germans as both a stepping stone for further operations into the Middle East and to deny the British air bases to strike at targets on the continent. Prior to the German attack the British managed to get a force of approximately 24,000 Commonwealth and 15,000 poorly trained Greek troops. All of the forces were poorly equipped since most of the heavy weapons and supplies had been lost in the evacuation from Greece. Wavell lacked the equipment, time, and shipping to make up the shortages prior to the German invasion.⁵²

On 27 April through Ultra intercepts Wavell learned of the impending German airborne assault. With his lack of trained and equipped forces Wavell realized the danger that existed. He argued for a withdrawal, but Churchill felt that "the airborne invasion of Crete ought to be a fine opportunity for killing the parachute troops. The island must be stubbornly defended."⁵³ Thus the British forces prepared and waited for the invasion.

German air attacks on the island began on 14 May while the Allied forces prepared defenses to deny the Germans access to the major airfields and ports.

On the 20th the Germans attacked with air and glider borne troops on the airfields and ports. Over the next several days fierce fighting existed as the Germans attempted to expand their foothold. Eventually, because of their air superiority the Germans were able to expand and begin to push the Allied forces off of Crete.⁵⁴

From 28 May through 1 June Wavell conducted the evacuation of Crete. Allied losses were extremely heavy as only 50% of the Commonwealth forces managed to get off the island while all of the Greek troops were killed or captured. The British did succeed in killing a large number of German parachute soldiers and these heavy losses prevented the future conduct of German airborne operations during the war.⁵⁵

Conclusion

Thus, due to the disasters in the Balkans and the failure of Operation Battleaxe in the Western Desert by 17 June 1941 Churchill had lost confidence in Wavell's leadership and replaced him with Field Marshall Sir Claude Auchinleck from the Indian Command. Wavell moved on to India. Auchinleck took command and due to Wavell's previous successes only faced combat in two theaters of war, not four. With the conclusion of the Syrian campaign in July only in the Western Desert did he have to directly face the Axis Powers.

Since the beginning of conflict in June 1940 Wavell conducted a series of sequential and all to often simultaneous, joint and combined, campaigns across his four theaters of operations. He had to skillfully manage his scarce assets and provide the leadership necessary to successfully defend the British position in the Middle East.

III. OPERATIONAL ART

Though the academic debate continues today over the historical and theoretical origins of operational art, the concept now firmly occupies its place in doctrine.⁵⁶ Over the past 10 years the concept of operational art has grown in importance and has been adopted as a critical component of US Military doctrine with respect to the planning, preparation, and conduct of war.

As with the development of all doctrine, the process of the adoption of operational art involved a period of reflection and debate prior to its acceptance within the US Military. This renewed interest in the development of doctrine and in particular the concept and role of operational art emerged following the negative American experience in the Vietnam War. The American Military came out of Vietnam with the realization that there had been a major disconnect between the strategy of the United States and its conduct of tactical operations. Even though over the course of the war that the United States won the vast majority of its tactical operations, those tactical victories still failed to set the conditions for victory at the strategic level.⁵⁷

Thus after the examination and rewriting of doctrine following Vietnam the concept of operational art emerged as an intellectual means to link strategic military objectives to tactical operations. Presently the US Military joint doctrine defines the current permutation of operational art with:

The employment of military forces to attain strategic or operational objectives in a theater of war or in a theater of operations through the design, organization, and conduct of campaigns and major operations. Operational art translates theater strategy into operational and, ultimately tactical operations.⁵⁸

Thus with this doctrinal concept military leaders can now use the intellectual process of operational art to develop the military campaigns and operations needed to link the tactical operations necessary to achieve strategic objectives.

Irregardless of the exact origin of the notion of operational art, the concept currently adopted by US joint doctrine describes the period history in World War II with the British campaigns of Wavell. As the historical review clearly demonstrates Wavell clearly understood and applied operational art. During his year of war time command in the Middle East, he developed and executed a multitude of campaigns in order to achieve British strategic objectives.

Early on with his command Wavell quickly assessed his situation and developed a theater strategy using his military forces in joint and combined operations. Though he received conflicting and ever changing strategic guidance and priorities from Churchill, Wavell never waived in updating his strategy in *pursuit of the British strategic objectives*.

He pursued his theater strategy throughout the Middle Eastern theater of war as he conducted over 16 major campaigns or operations in his four different theaters of operations. Very often these campaigns occurred simultaneously such as in May 1941 when he conducted over seven campaigns or operations simultaneously across all four theaters of operation. Wavell implemented his theater strategy by translating it into operational and tactical operations through his guidance, priorities, resources, and leadership. Wavell understood and applied the current US concept of operational art as he fought in the Middle East.

IV. CURRENT US MILITARY REQUIREMENTS

The historical review of Wavell's campaigns in the Middle East provides an example of modern war consisting of multiple regional contingencies

involving joint and combined operations. However, the question remains. What are the stated current US military requirements for dealing with similar situations? The answer lies in an examination of the current **National Military Strategy of the United States (NMS)**, the **Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Report on the Roles, Missions, and Functions of the Armed Forces of the United States (Roles and Missions)**, and the **Department of Defense's Bottom-Up Review (Bottom-Up Review)**.

The current NMS dates from January 1992 and the previous administration. The world's situation and the strategy of the US Military has continued to evolve since then. However, it remains valid until a new NMS is published outlining the new strategy. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff prepares and publishes the NMS following the publication of the President's **National Security Strategy of the United States (NSS)**. The role of the NMS is *to explain how the military plans to execute its duties and responsibilities in support of the NSS*.

The current NMS recognizes that the American defense posture has shifted dramatically since the end of the Cold War. With this shift the US is no longer focused on containing the spread of communism and Soviet aggression. Instead it reflects a more regionally focused defense strategy designed to respond to a myriad of possible threats to the interests of the US.⁵⁹ The NMS highlights some of the possible regions posing threats and the strategic principles guiding planning. It also discusses the possibility of the military having to deal with diverse operations spanning across the spectrum of war. Furthermore, though the focus is now on regional contingencies, the NMS still recognizes that the US Military must still plan and be prepared for a global war.⁶⁰

However, a key omission remains. No where does the document address possibility of having to deal with multiple regional contingencies. Other than the

reference to having to be prepared to fight a global war and its assumed theaters of war, the NMS fails to identify the possible requirement for the US to simultaneously fight in multiple regional contingencies with all of the resulting implications for the US Military. The NMS fails to recognize the possible lessons of history that the US, like Wavell in the Middle East, may have to deal with diverse, simultaneous campaigns and operations which could seriously threaten the security of the US.

However, like Wavell in the Middle East, a critical component of the NMS is the understood reliance on joint operations. Since the Joint Chiefs of Staff publishes the NMS, joint operations are inherent in any US Military operation. General Colin Powell argues that the success of this strategy will rest on "A Total Force--A Joint Force--a carefully tailored combination of our active and reserve components."⁶¹

Finally, like Wavell's campaigns, the NMS recognizes the crucial future role of combined operations with the US strategy. These combined operations may consist of regular alliances such as NATO or as ad hoc coalitions developed to meet a particular threat or situation such as the Gulf War Coalition against Iraq.⁶²

The **Roles and Missions** report produced by the Chairman provides the next document for examination of the current US Military requirements. The Chairman produces this document every two to three years as a recommendation to the Congress for possible changes to improve the effectiveness of the US Armed Forces. Like the NMS the **Roles and Missions** recognizes that due to changes in the global strategic situation where the current primary threat to US interests rests with regional contingencies. It highlights the key regions and some of the possible threats and contingency operations that the US could face. However, like the NMS, the **Roles and Missions** fails to address the possibility of

the US Military having a requirement to contend multiple and perhaps simultaneous regional contingencies.⁶³

The focus of this report is on improving the joint interoperability of the US Military while identifying and then eliminating unneeded duplication of effort among the different services. Thus, it provides a requirement for joint operations with any military operation. Because the **Roles and Mission** report focuses on the US Military and its interaction, it does not address the requirement or possibility of coalition warfare as the US deals with its regional threats.

The final document that provides guidance to the US Military on the current requirements for implementing national strategy is the **Bottom-Up Review**. The Secretary of Defense had the Defense Department conduct this review as a means to analyze the military force requirements necessary to meet the new strategic situation of the US. This review resulted from the realization that with the change in the strategic situation and the reduced threat that the US could afford to restructure and reduce the size of its armed forces as a way to reduce governmental expenditures for defense.⁶⁴

The **Bottom-Up Review** builds on the requirements identified with both the NMS and **Roles and Missions** with one important addition. With the **Bottom-Up Review** comes the realization that, like Wavell in the Middle East, the US may have to deal with multiple nearly simultaneous regional contingencies. This serves as the principle for the strategy driving the review.

Unfortunately, the **Bottom-Up Review** limits the requirement for the maximum number of simultaneous regional contingencies that the military may have to deal with to two and assumes that they are "nearly" simultaneous. The Review makes the assumption that with the demise of the Soviet threat that it is highly unlikely that two regional contingencies would occur simultaneously. It also argues that it would be too expensive to buy the strategic air and sea lift

necessary to conduct two simultaneous contingencies. Thus, the planning scenario is "nearly" simultaneous where the lift is used to move forces to one contingency and then the other.⁶⁵

A critical aspect of the two contingency scenario envisioned with the **Bottom-Up Review** deals with the possibility of a "win-hold-win" situation where the US commits sufficient forces to win in one contingency, while it conducts an economy of force operation in the second until the first one is finished.⁶⁶ This concept is very much in keeping with Wavell's strategy as he fought in the Middle East. Though this concept received a great deal of ridicule in the press, based on historical precedent and force limitations, it probably remains valid.

In order to deal with the requirements of multiple regional contingencies the strategy promulgated by the **Bottom-Up Review** relies heavily on joint and combined warfare. In every situation the US Military would have to put together the right combination of the various services to come up with the right force package for the job. In addition, the US would rarely go unilaterally especially if it was facing multiple contingencies. The expectation would be that the US would provide the leadership to an alliance or coalition and that other countries would provide combat forces and support as required.⁶⁷

Thus this examination of the documents currently outlining the US Military strategy does provide some insights into the current requirements for multiple regional contingency scenarios and for joint and combined operations. As the strategy has transitioned from the Cold War to regional contingencies, the US Military has adopted the requirement for two possible "nearly" simultaneous regional contingencies. Yet it possesses a major weakness as it assumes away the possibility of having to deal with numerous simultaneous contingencies such as faced by Wavell. However, as Wavell demonstrated in the Middle East, the US

Military has correctly identified the requirement that success in future wars will involve both joint and combined operations.

V. CURRENT US MILITARY DOCTRINE

Though the previous section highlights the some of the new requirements for the US Military in terms of the new strategic focus on regional contingency operations with reduced force structures, a question remains: Has the Department of Defense in general and the individual services in particular adopted new doctrine to reflect the requirements for the possibility of dealing with multiple regional contingencies through the use of joint and combined warfare? For each of the services their basic doctrine provides an explanation of how they think about, plan, and conduct warfare.

Joint Pub 1 JOINT WARFARE OF THE US ARMED FORCES (Joint Pub 1), serves as the lead document for warfare for the US Military and thus provides the doctrine for the employment of those forces. It defines doctrine as the "fundamental principles that guide the employment of forces". Thus, "joint doctrine offers a common perspective from which to plan and operate, and fundamentally shapes the way we think about and train for war."⁶⁸

Joint Pub 1 begins to reflect the changes in the strategic environment with the end of the Cold War with a greater emphasis on regional contingencies.⁶⁹ Yet, it has a critical omission. It fails to identify the possibility of having to fight multiple simultaneous campaigns or operations and the implications for the US Military of such a fight. However, this focus on regional contingencies does involve the requirement for having a power projection force with the capability of going and fighting around the globe. Thus, "This projection of power is inherently a joint undertaking."⁷⁰ The remainder of this document

explains why and how the armed forces of the US will conduct joint operations in order to achieve strategic objectives. Though the focus is on joint operations there exists the recognition of the possible role of combined operations as the US conducts operations with alliances and coalitions.

FM 100-5 Operations, as the Army's keystone document on doctrine, provides the foundation on how the Army plans to fight. Being the most recently written doctrine of the services, FM 100-5 most closely reflects the shift in the strategic environment since the Cold War with the new emphasis on regional contingencies. Though the Army identifies a number of potential contingencies and recognizes that there may be multiple theaters of operations within a theater of war, its doctrine fails to specifically discuss how the Army would fight in simultaneous major regional contingencies.

In terms of joint warfare, FM 100-5 argues that "It is inherently a joint doctrine that recognizes the teamwork required of all the services."⁷¹ The Army clearly recognizes that it depends on the other services to help it accomplish its missions. Throughout the manual there are continued references as to how the Army plans to fight as part of a joint and very often combined team. In addition the doctrine includes a chapter devoted to both joint operations and considerations for combined operations.

Air Force doctrine is found in **Air Force Manual 1-1 Basic Aerospace Doctrine of the United States Air Force**. "This is an airman's doctrine--written by air scholars for use by air practitioners."⁷² This doctrine focuses almost exclusively on how the Air Force plans to employ air power to fight and win the next war. This discussion on the next war fails to take into account that the national strategy is more focused on regional as opposed to global threats. In addition it fails to realize that the Air Force may be involved in several wars simultaneously and thus fails to address how the Air Force might plan to do that.

Though the focus of this doctrine is on aerospace power it does briefly acknowledge the existence of the other services, though not by name. It fails to acknowledge the role of joint operations and how all the services will work together in order to produce the desired synergistic effect in any conflict. It also briefly mentions that wars may be fought as part of an alliance or coalition.

FMFM 1 Warfighting outlines the basic doctrine of the Marines. It focuses solely on how the Marines view war and how they intend to fight that war. A supporting document **FMFM 1-2 The Role of the Marine Corps in the National Defense** provides information on the changes in the strategic environment and coordination with other military forces. The Marines acknowledge the greater focus on regional contingencies, but this is no major change from earlier doctrine as they have always prepared for such contingencies and also for simultaneous operations in their role as a expeditionary force. Still their doctrine does not address the issue of possible *simultaneous major regional* contingencies.

In addition the Marines have traditionally been a joint force in their unique relationship with the Navy. As an expeditionary force they have always relied on the Navy to get them where they need to be and to support them. In **FMFM 1-2** they do acknowledge that the Army and Air Force may play a crucial role especially in terms of larger operations.⁷³ The Marines also agree that combined operations may play a larger role in future operations.

For the Navy **From The Sea** identifies their new doctrine. As with the other services the Navy identifies the changes in the strategic environment and has begun to reshape its doctrine to deal with regional challenges and opportunities. With this doctrine the Navy focuses on how it and its Marines will meet those challenges as it expands and capitalizes on its traditional expeditionary roles.⁷⁴

This traditional expeditionary role for the Navy has been its ability to rapidly shift Naval and Marine forces around the globe to conduct contingency operations. It is now applying more emphasis on this as opposed to its Cold War focus on countering the Soviet Union. Still even with this new focus that is no acknowledgment that Naval forces may have to respond to multiple simultaneous major regional contingencies and how the Navy may deal with such a situation.

In terms of joint and combined operations **From The Sea** does identify the requirement. However, the thrust of the Navy's program for joint operations rests on its traditional unique interaction with the Marines. It only mentions interaction with the Army and Air Force on two occasions, while the remainder of its discussion on joint operations focuses on the Marines. **From The Sea** barely mentions the role that combined operations will play in the future for the US.

Thus all of the doctrine reviewed requires some revision based on the new requirements for multiple major regional contingencies with joint and combined operations. The requirements for revision vary from service to service. **Joint Pub 1** requires an acknowledgment of and an explanation of how the US Military with its reduced force structure may have to fight several simultaneous major regional contingencies. The Army also requires an acknowledgment that it may face simultaneous major regional contingencies and it needs to develop a strategy for dealing with this particular situation.

The Air Force needs to shift its focus away from air power winning the next war to a more balanced approach. This approach first needs to acknowledge the possibility of simultaneous regional contingencies. Next it needs to recognize that it will fight, as outlined in the doctrine of the Department of Defense, as part of a joint team configured for a particular situation and often as part of an alliance or coalition.

Though the traditional role of the Marines as an expeditionary force prepares them to think in terms of simultaneous contingencies, most of the contingencies are small in nature that can be handle by a small afloat force. How will they deal with multiple major regional contingencies? The Marines also need to recognize with their doctrine that they are now part of a joint team that involves other services besides the Navy. In addition combined warfare could play a role in their future

Finally, Naval doctrine also needs to acknowledge the requirement for dealing with multiple major regional contingencies and how it plans to accomplish its inherent missions. In addition the Navy needs to continue to expand their view of joint warfare to acknowledge the role that Army and Air Force will play in most major contingencies.

VI. IMPLICATIONS FOR OPERATIONAL ART TODAY

The study of Wavell's campaigns in the Middle East provides a number of possible implications for operational art today within the US Military. These include doctrine, the political/military relationship, CINC level leadership, contingency planning, the time/space/distance relationship, intelligence operations, logistics, joint operations, and combined operations.

Though this paper has already discussed doctrine in section V several other doctrinal implications emerge from Wavell's campaigns. Currently US Military doctrine focuses on achieving a quick decisive victory when armed forces are committed to combat. This is a sound concept when the military is able to bring overwhelming combat power against an opponent. However, based on our historical experience in Korea and in Southwest Asia, with its current manning and force structure the US Military should be able to achieve this only

when facing one major regional contingency. The collective doctrine fails to address the situation, like Wavell's in the Middle East, where the US Military faces numerous regional contingencies such as a second war in Korea and Southwest Asia coupled with ongoing requirements such as peace keeping and humanitarian assistance. What happens when the force structure does not provide for overwhelming combat power and quick decisive victory?

Perhaps the doctrinal answer realistically rests with the win/hold/win concept. Like Wavell when he faced a multitude of competing campaigns, the US Military needs to recognize that perhaps that they can not rapidly win every contingency. Instead it will have to develop priorities based on political guidance which will entail pursuing victory in certain contingencies, while it conducts an economy of force effort in others. The economy of force effort holds the enemy until sufficient forces are available to insure a victory. Wavell constantly had to follow this strategy as he shifted forces from theater to theater to deal with multiple contingencies.

A critical aspect of this strategy involves the concept of retreat or a withdrawal of forces when the situation warrants. Doctrine currently recognizes this concept, yet it is not looked upon in a favorable light. Unfortunately a retreat automatically entails the thought of a defeat as opposed to saving forces in an economy of force role. A retreat may prove to be a valuable tool in the future as it provides a number of options for a commander. A retreat saves forces so that they can fight again. It can force the enemy to follow and thus more rapidly force him to reach his culminating point. A retreat also provides an opportunity for setting the conditions for a later counterattack and other operations.

Wavell realized that with his limited forces that he could not win simultaneously in all theaters. He used retreats or withdrawals throughout his

theater to save his forces to fight another day as he practiced the concept of win/hold/win in 1940 and 41. This concept can still work today.

Wavell's campaigns in the Middle East continually reflected the constant tension in a democracy in the political/military relationship concerning the prosecution of the strategy. Wavell fully appreciated his relationship as subordinate in regards to his political masters in London. Churchill and the war cabinet had the responsibility for providing national strategy and guidance to his theater commander. Wavell had the responsibility for translating Britain's strategic objectives into a military strategy for his theater. Problems emerged as Churchill continually changed his guidance and priorities without understanding the situation on the ground. These problems became more acute as the number of campaigns increased in the Spring of 1941. The constant political interference greatly hampered Wavell as he attempted to prosecute his strategy.

In addition to the constant political interference, Churchill, who felt that he was an expert in military affairs, provided constant military guidance and advise. He reached the point where he was telling Wavell where to move individual battalions to and how to prepare defenses to stop the Germans. This same micro-management by the political leadership has plagued US military operations in the past such as President Johnson's preoccupation with tactics and operations in Vietnam. Thus, when dealing with multiple regional contingencies or campaigns the political leadership must be willing to give the strategic direction and provide the resources and then let the theater commander fight his war. In turn the theater commander must insure that he develops and prosecutes a theater strategy that satisfies the strategic requirements.

An intimate component of the political/military relationship is the role played by the CINC level leader such as Wavell. The CINC level leader has to be able to educate his political masters as to the operational and political realities of

his theater. If he is able to do this then the political leaders will have a much better understanding of the theater strategy and why the CINC developed it that way. Wavell failed to adequately educate Churchill and thus suffered accordingly.

In addition that leader very often serves as both a military leader and a diplomat. As the military leader he is responsible for directing all of the military operations within his theater. As the senior military leader and representative of his government he often has to serve as a diplomat to negotiate both military and diplomatic strategy within the theater. Throughout his tenure Wavell negotiated with a number of foreign political leaders as a way to implement his theater strategy and maximize his limited forces. For example he spent a great deal of time in the Balkans from November 1940 until the fall of Crete in June 1941 trying to develop political solutions to reinforce his military strategy. Also as a diplomat the CINC will often have to deal with obstinate allies with their own agendas as he conducts joint and combined operations in support of his strategy.

Also the CINC level leader has to constantly maintain a big picture and pursue his vision for his theater without getting bogged down in the details of individual operations. Wavell had to constantly shift his priorities and limited resources across his immense theater to meet an ever-changing situation. He had to make decisions limiting the chance of complete success in certain campaigns in order to insure an overall theater success. That requirement remains today especially if a CINC has to deal with multiple regional contingencies within his theater.

Contingency planning served as one of Wavell's critical ongoing, never ending tasks throughout his tenure in command. As he initially surveyed his vast theater he realized that he faced the possibility of dealing with an almost infinite number of contingency operations based on his large number of potential friends

and enemies. As the situation continued to evolve he constantly had his staff update plans in anticipation of changes. Realizing that he had limited resources, he worked through military and political negotiations to minimize the number of simultaneous situations requiring combat. As campaigns and operations unfolded he maintained branches and sequels so that he was prepared to change with the situation. This continues to remain true for today.

Because of the vast area of his theater and his constantly constrained resources a key element of his planning dealt with the time/space/distance relationship. His theaters of operations were often separated by 500 to a 1000 miles and he lacked an adequate infrastructure system and lift assets to be able to rapidly shift his forces from one theater to another. Thus, he carefully calculated what it would take in terms of time and lift assets to move a given size force a set distance. He often built his campaigns around this requirement. For example in December 1940 he pulled a division out of the fight in the Western Desert so it could move to East Africa and be available for the start of that campaign. He continually faced this time/space/distance dilemma as he tried to react to ever-changing political guidance and priorities with his limited resources.

Another key component of contingency planning involves intelligence operations. Sun Tzu's advice to "know your enemy" held true for Wavell and remains valid for today. Wavell faced a number of different enemies in his theater to include the Germans, Italians, Vichy French, and nationalist forces. He had to deal with them individually and together depending on the time and the theater. They all had different strengths, weaknesses, and motivations. This diverse number and ever-changing face of his enemy made it difficult for Wavell to constantly know his enemy. Normally through a number of different means Wavell had good intelligence on his different foes.

However, his greatest failure came when he initially analyzed Rommel and the Germans in the Western Desert by the Italian standards. Wavell knew that the Germans had arrived but he calculated that it would take them two months to get ready for serious offensive operations. Thus Wavell thought that he had time to conduct and complete his campaigns in Greece and East Africa before he had to shift forces to react to the Germans. Rommel proved him wrong and chased the British out of Libya and back into Egypt.

The value of accurate and constantly updated intelligence remains valid today. When planning for the possibility of simultaneous and multiple regional operations the US Military will most likely face different opponents. It is tough enough gaining accurate intelligence on a non-traditional foe in a contingency operation, such as on the clans in Somalia, in order to support the requirements for the commander to know his enemy. Each additional or potential foe puts additional strain on an intelligence system that has a finite capacity. Thus each additional foe makes it much more difficult for the commander to get adequate intelligence for the decisions he has to make. Finally, the unplanned nature of most contingency operations provides little time to establish an intelligence gathering operation to get the information that the commander may need for planning and executing an operation.

As Wavell conducted his multitude of campaigns a major limiting factor that he constantly had to work around involved his logistic situation. He never had enough resources of supplies to fully support all of his operations. Also the vast distances of his theater and the lack of an adequate infrastructure repeatedly hindered his efforts to shift what supplies that he did have from one point to another. The time/distance/space relationship both within his theater and from Britain constantly impacted on Wavell's ability to supply his forces. Once the Italians had closed the Mediterranean Sea to all shipping but heavily escorted

convoys, it took an additional six weeks for supplies to sail around Africa to get to Egypt.

The Suez Canal and the Nile Delta served as his base of operations. During his tenure he developed the infrastructure of that base from a capability to support approximately 30,000 troops for local contingencies to one that could support over 300,000 troops with campaigns going on in all four theaters of operations. In addition, because of its location and its physical and psychological value, he had to protect that base. Rommel and his forces constantly threatened that base of operations and Wavell had to devote considerable effort and resources to protecting it. These limitations on his logistic operations in turn limited the options available to him to prosecute his theater strategy. Wavell had to remain flexible.

The US Military may face a number of these problems as it attempts to *fight regional contingencies*. First, there will be a competition for limited supplies between the different contingencies. Next a force projection military has to transport all of its logistics with it. This impacts on the time/distance/space relationship as the US Military attempts to move all of this over long distances into possibly austere environments with very limited strategic lift assets. Once the military finally arrives in the theater it will have to establish and then secure a base of operation before beginning major operations.

Joint operations for Wavell proved crucial to both his success and failure in his campaigns. He had to work with a command structure where each of the service chiefs, army, air, and naval, served as equals. Luckily the other two chiefs realized that the bulk of the operations in the Middle East would focus on land operations so that they were more than willing to work in support of Wavell. Still at times they received contrary guidance from their bosses in London. Most of the times the services were able to achieve a unity of effort in support of the

theater strategy. The current joint nature of the US Military with the unified command structure should eliminate most of the potential problems that Wavell faced.

One problem with joint operations that Wavell had that could prove devastating to the US when faced with fighting multiple regional contingencies involves gaining and maintaining control of the air. The Royal Air Force had very limited assets in the Middle East. Once Wavell started fighting multiple simultaneous campaigns in a number of different theaters, the RAF could not maintain control of the air. This especially held true in the Greek and Crete campaigns when they were driven from the sky. Once that had happened the German and Italian air forces were able to turn their full attention to disrupting the British ground operations and thereby cause heavy losses. Maintaining control of the air plays a crucial role with all US doctrine. How many major simultaneous contingencies can the US handle before it runs out of assets?

Combined operations serve as the final implication of Wavell's campaigns for the current US practice of operational art. Just about all of his campaigns were combined in nature. This required Wavell to be both a military leader and diplomat. During his command he had to work with British, Australian, New Zealand, Free French, Polish, South African, Indian, West African, East African, Greek, Crete, Native, and Jewish forces. This vast combination of diverse cultures and forces resulted in a number of problems that hindered the overall efficiency of the military. These problems included issues of allegiance, to Wavell or national authorities, differing political agendas, doctrine and equipment compatibility, and logistical supportability.

These issues concerning combined operations remain valid today if the US has to fight a number of regional contingencies since it plans to fight combined warfare with alliances and coalitions. Wavell was able to bring these diverse

forces together because the majority of his forces were part of the British Commonwealth and they had a common just cause to unify their ultimate efforts: the defeat of the Axis powers. The US does not have a commonwealth that it can call on for support. Instead, it will have to work to build a coalition for each particular situation. Thus, for success today and in the future, like Wavell and the successful US led coalition in the Gulf War, the US will have to identify a common just cause to unify all the members of the alliance or coalition.

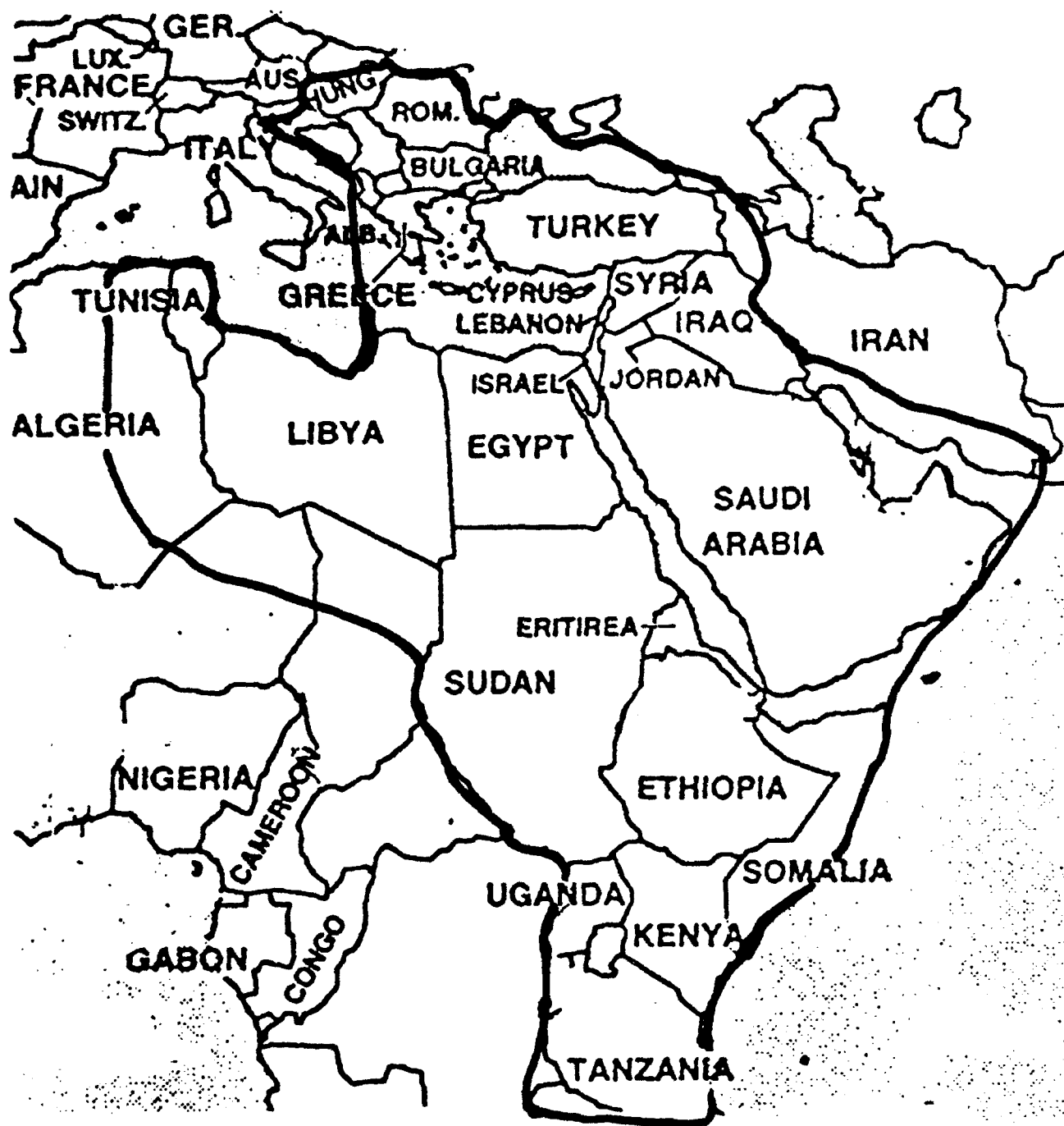
VII. CONCLUSION

Today the United States confronts an uncertain world. The strategic environment has changed. It no longer has one main enemy and a military force to confront that foe. Instead, the United States must be prepared to deal with a multiple of possible threats as its military continues to downsize. This new *regional orientation and world situation* requires that the US Military be ready to fight simultaneous major regional contingencies to achieve the victories that the American people expect.

Therefore, this study has examined Wavell's campaigns in the Middle East in WW II to provide a historical case study of a similar situation. There a commander had to simultaneously fight a large number of campaigns and operations over four theaters of operations against different enemies under difficult conditions to achieve strategic objectives. An analysis of this case study with the current strategic military requirements facing the US and current US Military doctrine indicates that the US Military needs to update both its National Military Strategy and its doctrine in order to be prepared to fight and win multiple simultaneous major regional contingencies in the future. In addition, this study has indicated a number of implications for the conduct of operational art by the US Military.

ANNEX A

Wavell's Theater of War



MIDDLE EAST COMMAND 1940-1941

ANNEX B

A MATRIX OF WAVELL'S CAMPAIGNS

Theater	Date												
	1940						1941						
	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
Western Desert													
Libya								A	—	A	&	D	D
Tobruk											D	—	D
Egypt	&	—	—	&	D	&	—	&	A	A	"	—	"D-DADAD-D
Egypt OOTW	"	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	"
East Africa													
British Somaliland	"	—	"	&	—	&	D	D			AA	"	—
Sudan	"	—	"	&	—	&	DD	&	—	&	A	—	A"
Eritrea			&	—	—	—	—	&	A	—	A	"	—
Ethiopia			&	—	—	—	—	&	A	—	A	"	—
Italian Somaliland			&	—	—	—	—	&	A	A	"	—	—
Kenya	"	—	"	&	—	—	—	&	"	—	—	—	"
Balkans													
Greece										"	—	D	D
Crete												D	D
Palestine													
OOTW	"	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	"
Iraq	"	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	D	A	A	
Syria/Lebanon													A-A
	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
	1940						1941						

Key Presence "--" Contact &--& Defend D--D Attack A--A 75

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- ³⁹Pitt, **Churchill and the Generals**, pg. 63-65.
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- ⁴⁶Ibid., pg. 218-220.
- ⁴⁷Ibid., pg. 221-222.
- ⁴⁸MacDonald, pg. 108-111.
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